

during this trip is their sense of obligation to fight oppression and cruelty wherever it appears, and that any group of people who are degrading another group of people have to be fought against with whatever tools we have available to us.

So obviously, it's a moving experience, a moving moment. We want to thank those who arranged for the tour and the people of Ghana for preserving this history. As painful as it is, I think that it helps to teach all of us that we have to do what we can to fight against the kinds of evils that, sadly, still exist in our world, not just on this continent but in every corner of the globe.

And I think, as Americans and as African Americans, obviously, there's a special sense that on the one hand this place was a place of profound sadness; on the other hand, it is here

where the journey of much of the African American experience began. And symbolically, to be able to come back with my family, with Michelle and our children, and see the portal through which the diaspora began, but also to be able to come back here in celebration with the people of Ghana of the extraordinary progress that we've made because of the courage of so many, Black and White, to abolish slavery and ultimately win civil rights for all people, I think, is a source of hope. It reminds us that as bad as history can be, it's also possible to overcome.

Thanks, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:57 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Prior to Departure from Accra, Ghana *July 11, 2009*

Hello, Ghana. Thank you. Thank you. I want to thank the people of Ghana for this extraordinary visit. Michelle and I have been greatly honored to be joined by President Mills and his lovely wife. They have been gracious hosts.

You know, your President and I have a lot in common. We're both lawyers; we're both former law professors; we're both new Presidents. We both like to think of ourselves as athletes. The difference is President Mills played hockey on the national team of Ghana, and I played basketball mostly in my backyard. *[Laughter]* But we both love sports.

We're both proud of serving our countries. And today I want to honor President Mills for his strong and thoughtful leadership, his devotion to democracy, and his commitment for the future of this nation.

Now, I also want to thank the magnificent welcoming committee, including the drummers and the dancers. Michelle and I and our daughters enjoyed it very much.

I want to recognize our Peace Corps volunteers who are here. You know, Ghana was the very first nation to host young people from the Peace Corps. And for decades, our two nations have formed vital partnerships and lasting

friendships because of this program. So all of you in the Peace Corps, you are doing an outstanding job, and we're proud of you.

As somebody whose father comes from Africa, obviously, this visit has been particularly meaningful for me. I've had a chance to discuss the future of Ghana but also the future of Africa with President Mills. I've spoken to the Parliament here in Ghana about America's commitment to supporting democracy and development. Michelle and I visited La General Hospital, where we met with beautiful women and their children who are getting the care that they need for a healthy start.

And finally, we toured Cape Coast Castle, a place for centuries where men, women, and children of this nation and surrounding areas were sold into slavery. I'll never forget the image of my two young daughters, the descendants of Africans and African Americans, walking through those doors of no return, but then walking back those doors of return. It was a remarkable reminder that while the future is unknowable, the winds always blow in the direction of human progress.

At each point of our visit here, I was reminded of the enduring bond between our nations.

The men and women taken from this nation helped to build my own. And today, many of our leading citizens trace their roots to these shores. Your first President attended a university in the United States, as did your current one. Great civil rights leaders of America, like Dr. Martin Luther King, looked to the independence movement here in Ghana and asked themselves, "If Africans can live freely in Africa, why can't African Americans live freely in America?"

And immigrants from Ghana and from all across Africa have thrived all across America. Today, both our nations are diverse and vibrant democracies. Here in Ghana, many different ethnic groups speak many languages, but have found a way to live and work together in peace. People here can speak freely and worship freely. You have a robust civil society, fair elections, and a free press, a growing market economy, and a sense of energy and optimism. And every day with its success, Ghana sends a simple message to the world that democracy can thrive in Africa.

So we in America are proud of our partnership with Ghana. Together, we've worked to advance education and fight poverty. We've made real and measurable strides in fighting diseases from malaria to tuberculosis to polio and neglected tropical diseases. This is a partnership we intend to continue. It's a partnership based not just on shared interests, but on shared ideals, ideals forged in struggles for independence that have made our countries who they are.

We believe that democracy is not simply a gift from previous generations, but a responsibility for each generation to preserve and to pass on. We believe that no one, whether it's through the influence of politics, the power of money, or the fear of force is above the law. And we believe that we're all equal, all endowed with basic human dignity, all entitled to basic human rights.

It is up to each of us, every one of us, to uphold those ideals. This is true not just in Ghana but for all of Africa. America wants to partner with the people and nations of Africa, but we

all know that the future of Africa is in the hands of Africa.

So I especially want to, again, speak to the young people of Africa. In places like Ghana, you make up more than half the population, and here is what you must know, that the world is what you make of it. You have the power to hold your leaders accountable and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in communities like these Peace Corps workers and harness your energy and education to renew and build connections between the world. You can conquer disease and end conflict and make change from the bottom up. You can do all that.

And I promise you this: If you seize this opportunity, if you take responsibility for your future, America will be with you every step of the way as a partner and as a friend. Freedom is your inheritance, hard won 52 years ago by men and women determined to cast off the title of subjects for the title of citizens and claim for themselves and their children the liberties that are all of our birthrights.

Dr. King came here to Ghana to witness the culmination of that struggle. He watched as the Union Jack was lowered and the Ghanaian flag was raised at the Parliament. He marveled at the site of the Duchess of Kent dancing with the new Ghanaian President at the state ball. And in a sermon he gave upon returning home to America, he said of this new nation, "There is a great day ahead. The future is on its side." Those words ring just as true today as they did more than half a century ago.

Great days lie ahead for this nation. The future is on Ghana's side. I promise that America will be with you. And together we will create a better world.

Thank you, Ghana. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:24 p.m. at Kotoka International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to President John Evans Atta Mills of Ghana and his wife Naadu. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Mills.

Remarks on the Nomination of Regina M. Benjamin To Be Surgeon General and an Exchange With Reporters July 13, 2009

The President. Good morning, everybody. Before I introduce America's next Surgeon General, I'd like to say a few words about our ongoing efforts to reform the health care system that she will help oversee.

We are now closer to the goal of health care reform than we have ever been. Over the last several weeks, key committees in the House and the Senate have made important and unprecedented progress on a plan that will lower costs, provide better care for patients, and curb the worst practices of the insurance companies. It's a plan that will not add to our deficit over the next decade. Let me repeat that: It is a plan that will not add to our deficit over the next decade and eventually will help lower our deficit by slowing the skyrocketing costs of Medicare and Medicaid.

Now, even though we are close, I've got no illusions that it's going to be easy to get over the finish line. There are going to be more debates and more disagreements before all is said and done. But health care reform must be done.

I know there are those who believe we should wait to solve this problem, or take a more incremental approach, or simply do nothing. But this is the kind of criticism we heard when the country tried to pass Medicare, a program that is now providing quality care to generations of American seniors. It's the kind of criticism we heard when we tried to pass the Children's Health Insurance Program, which has provided quality care and coverage to millions of kids. It's the same Washington thinking that has ignored big challenges and put off tough decisions for decades. And it is precisely that kind of small thinking that has led us into the current predicament.

So make no mistake: The status quo on health care is no longer an option for the United States of America. If we step back from this challenge right now, we will leave our children a legacy of debt, a future of crushing costs that bankrupt our families, our businesses, and because we will have done nothing to bring down the costs of Medicare and Medicaid, will crush

our Government. Premiums will continue to skyrocket, placing what amounts to another tax on American families struggling to pay bills. The insurance companies and special interests that have killed reform in the past will only continue to benefit even more, and they'll continue to deny coverage to Americans with preexisting medical conditions. People will continue to lose health insurance just because they lose their job or they change jobs.

This is a future that we cannot afford. This country can't afford to have health care premiums rise three times faster than people's wages, as they did over the last decade. We can't afford 14,000 Americans losing their health care every single day. We can't afford a future where our Government will eventually spend more on Medicare and Medicaid than what we spend on everything else.

And during the campaign, I promised health care reform that would control costs, expand coverage, and ensure choice. And I promised that Americans making \$250,000 a year or less would not pay more in taxes. These are promises that we're keeping as reform moves forward.

This is no longer a problem we can wait to fix; this is about who we are as a country. Health care reform is about every family's health, but it's also about the health of the economy. So I just want to put everybody on notice, because there was a lot of chatter during the week that I was gone: We are going to get this done; inaction is not an option. And for those naysayers and cynics who think that this is not going to happen, don't bet against us. We are going to make this thing happen because the American people desperately need it.

And even those who are satisfied with their health care right now, they understand that if premiums keep on doubling and if employers keep on shedding health insurance because it's unsustainable and if you look at the trajectory of where Medicare and Medicaid are going, then inaction will create the biggest crisis of all.

And so I understand people are a little nervous and a little scared about making change.